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RHMFIIU/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL IMMEDIATE

RHMFIIU/DEPT OF HOMELAND SECURITY WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

RHMFIIU/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

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SUBJECT: Nicaragua: 2009 Country Report on Terrorism

REF: A) 09 STATE 122733; B) 09 STATE 109980

General Assessment

¶1. No acts of international terrorism occurred in Nicaragua in 2009. Three items from the 2008 report that remained largely unchanged. In 2009 Nicaragua made no substantive progress towards establishing a Financial Intelligence Unit or passing the counterterrorism bill first proposed in 2004. Also, Nicaragua's judicial system remained a vulnerability that could be exploited by international terrorist groups. The judiciary remained highly politicized, corrupt and prone to manipulation by political elites and organized crime. The November 2007 decision by President Ortega granting Iranian and Libyan nationals visa-free entry into Nicaragua remained in effect during 2009. On March 18, 2009 Nicaragua upgraded several countries to visa-free entry status, which included Ecuador and the Palestinian Authority. Sensitive reporting indicates that human traffickers were adjusting their routes accordingly.

¶2. President Daniel Ortega continued to develop close relations with Cuba through official visits and regular, high-level contact with Cuban officials. On September 10, Nicaragua established formal diplomatic relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, two small breakaway Georgian Republics recognized only by Russia, Venezuela and Nauru. Ortega sustained close relations with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in 2009. On October 12, Nicaragua refused an official extradition request from Ecuador for two suspected FARC operatives who had been granted asylum in 2008 and continued to provide safe haven to one additional known senior FARC commander. During 2009, Nicaragua also gave political asylum to three Peruvian indigenous leaders accused of instigating a confrontation in the Peruvian Amazon that left 33 dead. President Ortega conducted no official state visits to Iran in 2009.

Safe Haven Assessment

¶3. In 2009, President Ortega continued to provide safe haven to Doris Torres Bohorquez and Martha Perez Gutiérrez, two suspected FARC operatives and survivors of the March 2008 Colombian military operation against the FARC. Both were granted asylum in Nicaragua and welcomed by President Ortega as survivors of "state-sponsored terrorism by Colombia." On October 12 the GON refused Ecuador's request to extradite Torres and Perez on the grounds that doing so would violate their human rights. Also during 2009, senior FARC official Nubia Calderon de Trujillo continued to enjoy "humanitarian asylum" in Nicaragua. In 2008 the U.S. Department of

Treasury's Office of Foreign Asset Control (OFAC) designated Calderon de Trujillo, along with seven other FARC international representatives, as significant narco-traffickers under the Kingpin Act. During 2009 Calderon, Torres and Perez did not appear publicly in Nicaragua.

¶4. There was no new information in the case of Alberto Bermudez, aka Rene Alberto Gutierrez Pastran, aka "Cojo," the FARC emissary granted a false Nicaraguan identity by Nicaragua's Supreme Electoral Council (CSE). However in December 2009, local media reported that the CSE provided legitimate Nicaraguan identity documents for false identities to several suspected drug traffickers, including Amauri Paul (alias Alberto Ruiz Cano), a Colombian criminal who was involved in an attack against Nicaraguan counter-narcotics forces that killed two Nicaraguan Navy personnel.

¶5. On June 9, 2009, the government granted political asylum to three Peruvian indigenous leaders, Alberto Pizango, Saul Puerta and Cervando Puerta. Pizango and the Puerta brothers received asylum in Nicaragua only days after the Peruvian government accused them of instigating an armed confrontation in the Peruvian Amazon that left 24 police and nine indigenous people dead. On October 13, Saul Puerta and Cervando Puerta returned to Peru after a Peruvian court overturned arrest orders against them. The same court upheld the arrest order for Pizango, who remains in Nicaragua.

Terrorist Organizations

¶6. No known terrorist groups operated openly in Nicaragua; however, as noted above, during 2009 at least three suspected FARC operatives were granted safe haven by the government of Nicaragua and remain in the country. Both the FARC and the ETA (Basque Fatherland and Liberty) have retired or inactive members residing in Nicaragua. Iran, Cuba and Libya maintained embassies in Nicaragua during 2008.

Foreign Government Cooperation

¶7. During 2009, the Embassy had increasing difficulty obtaining information from or access to civilian officials of the GON. In one instance the GON failed to comply with a routine evidence transfer request related to an arms-for-drugs case involving the FARC. Even so, there were several U.S.-Nicaragua military-to-military counterterrorism-related exchanges during the year that improved the Nicaraguan military's counterterrorism capabilities.

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